

Spiritan Magazine

Volume 33
Number 2 *Summer*

Article 4

Summer 2009

Portraits of St. Paul: St. Paul and the Spirit

Jerry Creedon

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-tc>

Recommended Citation

Creedon, J. (2009). Portraits of St. Paul: St. Paul and the Spirit. *Spiritan Magazine*, 33 (2). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-tc/vol33/iss2/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Spiritan Collection at Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spiritan Magazine by an authorized editor of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.

St. Paul and the Spirit

Jerry Creedon

I love the picture *Group Dance* in this year's *Spiritan* calendar. Turn to the month of May and look at it. There are six people, different in age, sex, colour, culture dancing as one. "All of them" the caption reads "were filled with the Holy Spirit." St. Paul would love that picture too. It expresses life, togetherness, harmony, freedom, joy, love, all the things that he associates with and attributes to the Holy Spirit.

The life-giving Spirit

For Paul the Holy Spirit is, above all, the Spirit of **life**. The dancers in our picture had to learn the movements of the dance. They learned those from books, instructors and one another. They made the movements perfect by practice. But the ability to dance comes from within. It has to be 'in you.' You either have it or you've had it!

That is, put rather glibly, how St. Paul understands the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit influences not only our actions but our very being. "The Spirit of God dwells in you," St. Paul tells us in Romans (8:9) and, in Galatians, "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (4:6).

Instructions tell the dancers how to dance. Laws tell us how to behave. Instructions do not empower dancers to dance. Laws do not empower us to do what is right. They are external signposts pointing in the right direction. They do not enable us to get there.

The Holy Spirit gives us that inner strength. The Spirit empowers us, enlivens us, stirs us to the very depths of our being. Therefore "our sufficiency is from God, who made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6).

Children of God are led by the Spirit

Notice how our dancers' hands, while joined, are lifted up. They are raised as if to "Our Father in Heaven." "All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God...

When we cry, Abba! Father! it is the Spirit itself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:14-16). We are not only images of God, now, we are God's children. We have reason to dance.

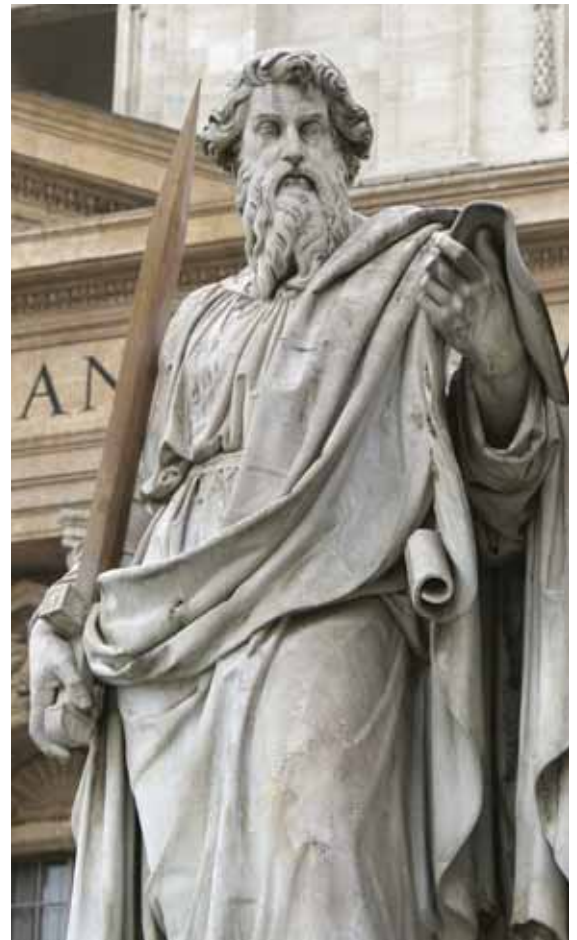
The Spirit: heart and soul of community

The title of the artwork we are looking at is *Group Dance*. We have an icon of community, togetherness, harmony. They all stem from love. And this, too, is the gift of the Spirit. "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5). Love unites. The Holy Spirit is the creator of communion within the Christian community. That is why the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, that which the Holy Spirit brings about, is invoked, prayed for, at the beginning of Mass. Just as love is the first fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), community is the first fruit of Pentecost.

The Book of Acts doesn't tell us if the group danced. It does tell us that they were together and shared what they had; they sold their possessions, "distributing them to each as any had need" (Acts 2:44). Like a good group of dancers, they lived and acted in harmony, "they were of one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32).

Praying in the Spirit

And they prayed together. Here, too, St. Paul assures us, the Holy Spirit comes to our rescue: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:26-27). Commenting on these words, Pope Benedict XVI stated: "It is as if to say that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit



© Massimo Merlini / Dreamstime.com

of the Father and the Son, is henceforth as it were the soul of our soul, the most secret part of our being, from which an impulse of prayer rises ceaselessly to God, whose words we cannot even begin to explain."

The Spirit of hope

Hovering over the dancers in our picture is the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. In that beautiful line in the Song of Songs, "The song of the dove is heard in our land," the dove is understood by some ancient commentators as a symbol of the Holy Spirit, heralding the advent of spring, of a new creation:

For see, the winter is past,
The rains are over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth,
The time of pruning the vines has come,
And the song of the dove is heard in our land (Cant. 2:11-12).

The Spirit is telling the dancers that they, and we, have something to dance for. The Holy Spirit is, St. Paul tells us, a guarantee of better things to come (Rom. 8:23). Set free by the Spirit from the tyranny of both past and present, we are encouraged by St. Paul to "keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25) and dance our way into the future. ■